

We claim:

1. An electronic price label (EPL) system comprising:
an electronic sign (ES) for displaying a promotional message; and
a host computer for reading a data file to determine if an identification number is associated with the ES or an EPL, said host computer for sending a message to the ES which includes a command for the ES to display the promotional message if the identification number is associated with the ES.
2. The EPL system of claim 1 wherein the host computer includes a promotional data file, and the host computer is for reading the promotional message from the promotional data file.
3. The EPL system of claim 1 wherein promotional data file includes a plurality of promotional messages, and wherein the host computer is for using the identification number to provide an index to select one of the plurality of promotional messages for transmission to the ESL.
4. The EPL system of claim 1 wherein host computer is further for sending a message to the EPL which includes a command for the ES to display a price if the identification number is associated with the EPL.
5. The EPL system of claim 1 wherein the identification number:
provides a message offset pointer indicating a location of the promotional message, if the identification number is associated with the ES,
provides a price offset pointer indicating a location of a price displayed by the EPL, if the identification number is associated with the EPL.

6. The EPL system of claim 1 wherein the price is stored in a price lookup (PLU) file.
7. The EPL system of claim 1 wherein the ES is not associated with any item's identification number in the PLU file.
8. The EPL system of claim 1 wherein the promotional message is associated with an offer.
9. The EPL system of claim 8 wherein the offer applies to a family of items which are not associated with a single PLU number.
10. The EPL system of claim 1 wherein the promotional message includes bundled price information associated with an offer.
11. The EPL system of claim 1 wherein the ES displays a default message when the ES is not displaying the promotional message.
12. The EPL system of claim 1 wherein the message sent to the ES includes a time period for which the promotional message is to be displayed.
13. The EPL system of claim 1 wherein the ES displays a default message after the time period has expired.
14. The EPL system of claim 13 wherein the ES displays the default message before the message is received.
15. The EPL system of claim 1 wherein the promotional message includes a frequent buyer price.
16. A method of displaying a promotional message by an electronic sign (ES) comprising the steps of:
 - (a) reading a record associated with an electronic price label (EPL) or the ES;

(b) determining if the record is associated with the EPL or the ES;

(c) reading a promotional data file to determine the promotional message, if the record is associated with the ES;

(d) sending a promotional display message to the ES; and

(e) displaying the promotional message by the ES.

17. The method of claim 16 wherein step (b) utilizes a flag which indicates if the record is associated with an EPL or an ES.

18. The method of claim 16 further comprising, before step (a), the step of:
displaying a default promotional message by the ES.

19. The method of claim 16 wherein the promotional display message includes a time period for which the promotional message is to be displayed.

20. The method of claim 19 further comprising the step of:

(f) displaying a default promotional message after the time period has elapsed.